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Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session (see E/2009/24 (Supp.), chap. I.B), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics. The report presents the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics based on the ideas formulated in the strategic plan to improve national and international agricultural and rural statistics as approved by the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session (E/CN.3/2009/3).

During 2009, the Global Strategy was developed and subsequently discussed at a large number of important meetings with many stakeholders, policymakers, statistical institutes and researchers at the national and international levels. As a result, countries and international organizations have made very broad-based commitments to the scope and content of the Global Strategy.

The Commission is requested to comment on the report and the Global Strategy, endorse the implementation of the Global Strategy, and agree that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, under the auspices of the Friends of the Chair, prepare an implementation plan for approval at the forty-second session of the Commission.

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Report of the Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics

I. Introduction

1. The purpose of the present report is to describe the progress made in developing the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (hereinafter referred to as the Global Strategy) as requested by the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session. It also summarizes the steps taken to receive input from a very large number of stakeholders to develop the Global Strategy and to seek their commitment to its implementation. The report concludes with recommendations for the implementation of the Global Strategy, which include establishing governance at the national level, taking steps to improve statistical capacity through the national strategies for the development of statistics, coordinating resources provided by donor organizations and supporting the national advocacy efforts to improve agricultural statistics. The Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics seeks the Statistical Commission's endorsement of the report and its advice on the implementation process.

2. At its fortieth session, held in February 2009, the Commission:

(a) Stressed that agricultural and rural statistics were essential for policymaking and that strategic direction was needed to meet the increasing demand for information at both the international and country levels, especially in the light of the recent food crisis;

(b) Emphasized the important role of agricultural ministries and other institutions in the compilation of agricultural statistics, as well as the coordination role of national statistical offices and national statistical councils;

(c) Supported the development of a strategic plan based on the recommendations in the report presented to the Commission, which included: establishing a set of core data that countries will provide, integrating agriculture into the national statistical system and developing a sustainable statistical system through governance and statistical capacity-building;

(d) Recognized the important role of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as the specialized agency in this field, and welcomed its commitment and effort to involve ministries of agriculture through its governing bodies in the development of the Global Strategy and the implementation plan;

(e) Requested that a Friends of the Chair group be formed to coordinate the development of the Global Strategy for presentation to the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session.

3. Under the guidance of the Friends of the Chair, FAO and the World Bank prepared a first draft of the Global Strategy, which then became the subject of a series of meetings and conferences during 2009, the outcome resulting in revisions leading to the presentation of the report to the forty-first session of the Statistical Commission.

4. The main elements of the Global Strategy are:

(a) A conceptual framework, based on a thorough assessment of users' data needs, that broadens the scope and coverage of agricultural statistics to include aspects of fisheries, forestry and rural households and establishes the need for a

survey framework that provides a linkage between the farm as an economic unit, the household as a social unit and the land they occupy in the natural environment;

(b) National and international agreement on a minimum set of core data to be provided, because the data requirements identified in the conceptual framework exceed what any country can provide for the same point in time;

(c) The integration of agriculture into the national statistical system. The challenges presented in the conceptual framework point directly to the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system. The Global Strategy provides the framework for achieving integration, which includes the development of a master sample frame for agriculture, its use in an integrated survey system and the implementation of a data management system;

(d) The sustainability of agriculture statistics. Under the conceptual framework leading to the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system, good governance will be required to bring together the efforts of the different stakeholders, especially national statistical institutes and ministries of agriculture. While the Global Strategy provides a framework for integration, it leaves the responsibility for implementation up to each country, and suggests that this may be accomplished through the formation of national statistics councils;

(e) The Global Strategy concludes with a description of the challenges remaining and outlines the way forward through the development of an implementation plan.

5. The Commission is asked to note that the Global Strategy is a long-range plan whose implementation will need to be preceded by a review of the governance of the national statistical system, an assessment of statistical capacity requirements, and the securing of resources to carry forward the effort. This undertaking will require a concerted effort by national, international and donor organizations.

6. Section II of the present report summarizes the background and the events leading to the decision to develop a global strategy to improve agricultural statistics. The consultation efforts to make the development of the strategy as inclusive as possible of all stakeholders are also outlined. Section III provides a more in-depth review of the Global Strategy. Section IV provides a summary and a set of recommendations for the consideration of the Commission.

II. Background and summary of the consultation and drafting process

7. The serious concerns about the quality of agricultural and rural statistics were first discussed in February 2008, at a meeting of interested parties immediately following the thirty-ninth session of the Statistical Commission. In 2008, with input from numerous stakeholders, the World Bank prepared a paper entitled "Framework to develop a strategic plan to improve national and international agricultural statistics". That paper was the focus of an Expert Group meeting in Washington, D.C., in October 2008. The outcome of that meeting was the report on global initiatives to improve agricultural and rural statistics (E/CN.3/2009/3), presented to the Statistical Commission at its fortieth session.

8. At its fortieth session, the Statistical Commission endorsed the work carried out to date, supported the development of a global strategy and agreed with the creation of a Friends of the Chair group to steer the process, with FAO and the United Nations Statistics Division serving as secretariat. The Commission also stressed the importance of proper representation of countries from all regions and at different levels of development in the preparation of the strategy, and welcomed the participation of interested countries in the group to ensure ownership of the process.

9. The Friends of the Chair group, established immediately after the fortieth session of the Statistical Commission, has been led by Brazil (Eduardo Pereira Nunes) and includes Australia, Brazil, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Italy, Morocco, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, the United States of America, FAO and the United Nations Statistics Division both as observer and serving as the secretariat, Eurostat (observer) and the World Bank (observer).

10. In 2009, under the auspices of the Friends of the Chair group, several specific meetings were organized. These meetings served two aims: to generate and receive further input on the Global Strategy and to obtain a commitment from the main stakeholders. The Global Strategy, available as a background document to the Statistical Commission at its current session, is the result of this wide consultation with national and international statistical organizations, as well as with agricultural ministries and other governmental organizations represented in FAO governing bodies. FAO took the initiative to also include the Strategy as a main item on the agendas of its biannual conference of November 2009 (which gathers Ministers of Agriculture from all member countries) and sessions of the Regional Commissions on Agricultural Statistics (National Directors of Agriculture Statistics). All of these discussions and consultations led to continuous improvement and refining of the Global Strategy.

11. An important first round of consultations among the network of statisticians was held immediately after the establishment of the Friends of the Chair group. A follow-up to these consultations was held during the Satellite Meeting on Agricultural Statistics in Maputo, back-to-back with the biannual conference of the International Statistical Institute (ISI). The ISI conference in Durban that followed provided additional opportunities to discuss the results of the Maputo meeting. Furthermore the review of agricultural statistics in the UNECE region explicitly recognized the importance of the enhancement of agricultural statistics in developing countries.

12. A satellite meeting on agricultural statistics was held in Maputo, on 13 and 14 August 2009 to review the draft Global Strategy. It was hosted by the National Statistics Institute of Mozambique and supported and sponsored by the African Development Bank, Eurostat, FAO, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (Paris21), the United Nations Statistics Division, the United States Department of Agriculture and the World Bank. More than 200 senior experts from international organizations, national statistical institutes and ministries of agriculture attended the meeting. Funding agencies such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also showed their interest by sending delegates to the meeting to discuss possibilities and modalities for participating in this global initiative.

13. The meeting was entirely dedicated to and organized around the various chapters of the Global Strategy. The purpose of the satellite meeting was to seek

input from international organizations and national agencies involved in the production and analysis of agricultural statistics.

14. During the conference, participants reached a consensus on the purpose of the Global Strategy, that of providing a vision for national and international statistical systems to support decision-making in the twenty-first century. The participants endorsed the vision and principles proposed.

15. Some important conclusions and recommendations were reached at the meeting. Participants recognized the present weakness of food and agricultural statistics and the important role they play in meeting the needs of current and emerging policy analysis and the decision-making process. They supported the proposed approach of the Global Strategy to integrate agricultural statistics with other sectors of national statistical systems, the need to establish clear functions and ensure the effectiveness of coordination structures, and the need to mainstream statistics into national development plans with adequate budgets. Participants also emphasized the importance of halting, and reversing, the decline in capacity in developing countries and recommended the coordination and strengthening of capacity-building for agricultural statistics.

16. Regarding the detailed proposals included in the Global Strategy, the participants found that further refinements and developments were needed in the conceptual framework, the methodology for assessing national capacity in agriculture statistics, the defining of a minimum set of core data, the integrated survey framework and the master sampling frame. The meeting requested the Friends of the Chair group to work further in these areas and to revise the Global Strategy, using inputs from the Maputo meeting, by forming task teams to further review and provide input for the four areas identified above. The broad-based consultations resulted in a commitment being made by a large number of countries to actively contribute to the development of the Global Strategy. The four task teams, led by Australia, the Philippines, China and the United States, respectively, delivered their input by the end of October 2009. The Global Strategy presented to the Commission was prepared by FAO and the World Bank using the extensive input from all stakeholders and from the Friends of the Chair task teams.

17. The fifty-seventh session of ISI, held in Durban, South Africa (16-22 August 2009) included a wide variety of meetings at which papers that had been invited and contributed on topics involving agricultural and rural statistics, such as censuses of agriculture and survey methods, as well as economic and environmental accounting for agriculture, that were related to issues raised in the Global Strategy were discussed. These sessions were attended by an estimated 300 participants.

18. The Paris 21 Consortium meeting in Dakar (November 2009) provided another opportunity to further discuss the Global Strategy with a variety of stakeholders, donors in statistical cooperation, Governments, private business and intermediate organizations and statisticians. A luncheon seminar on the Global Strategy attracted around 100 participants and contributed significantly to the further recognition of its importance. The situation of agricultural statistics and the Global Strategy was also a recurrent point raised in many of the discussions at this three-day meeting and figured prominently in the statements made at the plenary final session of the conference.

19. Efforts to expand access to the development of the Global Strategy to all ministries of agriculture and national statistical offices included the development of a Wikipedia web page (wiki.asfoc.ibge.gov.br). This global consultation helped the Friends of the Chair group to improve the Strategy document and disseminate information on the initiative. It will also help in the preparation of a detailed implementation plan for the Global Strategy.

20. The intergovernmental process for the adoption of the Global Strategy, led by the Statistical Commission and primarily involving heads of national statistical offices, was complemented by a parallel intergovernmental process, guided by FAO governing bodies, and involved representatives of ministries of agriculture, given their important role in the compilation of agricultural statistics.

21. The FAO Statistics Division has been working closely with other international development partners, including the World Bank, the African Development Bank, Eurostat, Paris21 and the United Nations Statistics Division in the process of developing the Global Strategy. In this context, the FAO Statistics Division has also coordinated input from all FAO departments, carrying out substantial statistical work.

22. A seminar chaired by the Assistant Director-General and head of the FAO Economic and Social Development Department was organized on 23 June 2009 for the permanent representatives to FAO to discuss the Global Strategy. Permanent representatives at the meeting expressed their strong support for the initiative. Statistics is considered to be a fundamental and important area of work for FAO and, as such, is recognized as a core function in its programme of work and budget. A renewed initiative to improve agricultural statistics was also in line with other important initiatives of FAO, such as the Impact Focus Area on Capacity Building for Information and Statistics and the CountrySTAT project. Permanent representatives acknowledged the challenges for improving statistical capacity and recommended the increased use of technology in these endeavours. They supported the Global Strategy on establishing statistical councils as the coordinating bodies in countries, and enhancing international partnership with other international development agencies. Several areas of statistical data needed for policy analysis and policymaking were also addressed. The permanent representatives requested to be kept informed and related information on the development of the Global Strategy to be posted on the website.

23. The Global Strategy has further been presented at the following regional statistical meetings for consultation and endorsement:

(a) FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Expert consultation on statistics in support of policies to empower small farmers, Bangkok, 8-11 September 2009;

(b) Twenty-first session of the FAO African Commission on Agricultural Statistics, Accra, 28-31 October 2009;

(c) FAO/Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, Working Group in Agricultural Statistics, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 10-12 November 2009.

24. The Global Strategy was one of the main agenda items of the thirty-sixth session of the FAO Conference (Rome, 18-23 November 2009). The Conference is the supreme governing body of FAO and meets in regular session once every two

years. Senior officials of the ministries of agriculture of all member nations and observers from non-member nations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations attend the Conference to determine the policies of the Organization, approve the programme of work and budget and make recommendations to members and international organizations.

25. The Conference unanimously supported the Global Strategy. It appreciated the leading role played by FAO in agricultural statistics and the extensive consultation process undertaken to develop the Global Strategy, which involved development partners and developed and developing countries. The Conference recognized that the Global Strategy was essential for the improvement of agricultural and rural statistics and to meet the new and emerging demand in statistics for development policies in the twenty-first century. More specifically, in a statement made on its behalf, the European Community and its member States indicated that most of the Global Strategy components were already in place in the European System of Agricultural and Rural Statistics and that it anticipated playing an active role in the next steps of implementation of the Global Strategy, mainly in developing countries.

26. The Global Strategy was conceived as a follow-up to the findings and recommendations of the recent independent evaluation of FAO's role and work in statistics. The integration of agriculture into national statistical systems was considered a very important component of the Strategy. For this reason, the Conference stressed the need for close collaboration between ministries of agriculture and national statistics offices and noted with satisfaction that these two Government agencies in the countries involved had been associated with the formulation of the Global Strategy.

27. The Conference noted that after the Global Strategy was endorsed by the Statistical Commission in February 2010, at its forty-first session, an implementation plan would be developed during that year. It recommended that adequate resources be allocated to statistics programmes, at both national and international levels. In that regard, the Conference stressed that a multi-donor approach was necessary to implement the Global Strategy.

28. Section III below outlines the main components of the strategy to improve agricultural statistics, based on the extensive efforts described above to obtain input from stakeholders.

III. Structure of the Global Strategy

29. The Global Strategy is based on a thorough assessment of users' needs and the statistics currently available. This assessment revealed both a serious decline in the quantity and quality of agricultural statistics and the emergence of many new data requirements. A significant amount of the country data in the FAO database has been imputed; some 30 per cent of the countries last conducted an agricultural census for either the 1980 or 1990 rounds. These emerging data requirements include issues closely interlinked with agriculture, such as poverty and hunger, climate change, the use of land and water, and the increasing use of food/feed commodities to produce biofuels.

30. Given these emerging data requirements, a new conceptual framework was developed to define the dimensions, units, scope, coverage and boundaries of

agricultural production and activities. As a result, the conceptual framework brings aspects of forestry, fisheries and the use of land and water into the agricultural and rural framework, and calls for a linkage between agricultural holdings, the household, and the land they occupy and use. The conceptual framework provides the foundation for the Global Strategy and translates policy issues into statistical language.

31. The conceptual framework also refers to a menu of indicators and the respective underlying data required. This creates data requirements that exceed what most countries could provide at the same point in time. In order to meet the requirements identified in the conceptual framework, the Global Strategy is based on three pillars: agreement on a minimum set of core data that each country will provide, the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system, and the establishment of a sustainable statistical system through governance and statistical capacity-building.

32. The first pillar is the identification of a minimum set of core data that will provide national and international policymakers with the necessary information about issues of interest to countries and also issues that go beyond national boundaries. The minimum set of core data includes statistics on production for major items, trade, land cover and water use, the effect of agriculture on the environment and climate change, and the monitoring of efforts to reduce poverty. As indicated in the conceptual framework, these data requirements are not independent of each other. The Global Strategy provides a framework for countries to add items of national interest to the set of core data and to determine the frequency with which they will be provided. The set of core data is the starting point for the improvement of agricultural statistics.

33. The second pillar of the Global Strategy is the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system to meet the requirements for the scope and coverage of agricultural statistics and the linkage between farms, households and land. Integration facilitates the concentration of resources from different sources, reduces duplication of efforts to produce statistics, and provides a blueprint for the inclusion of agriculture into national strategies for the development of statistics. Integration will be achieved through: (a) the development of a master sample frame for agriculture; (b) the implementation of an integrated survey framework; and (c) the development of a data management system, as follows:

(a) The Global Strategy provides alternatives to develop the master sample frame. All are based on the fundamental principle that the statistical units include farms and households, and reflect their linkage to each other and to land use. The development of the master sample frame includes the requirement to geo-reference census and administrative information to satellite imagery mapping land cover and use. The underlying principle is that the master sample frame is the source for samples for all surveys of farms, farm households, rural non-farm households and land use surveys. The master sample frame facilitates the use of sample designs that allow data analysis across surveys. Once the master sample frame has been developed, it should be possible for different institutions in the national statistical system to access it for survey purposes;

(b) The integrated survey framework builds on the capabilities presented by the master sample frame and the set of core data and related data requirements. The survey framework includes the use of replicated sampling and rotating panels to

collect data annually for core items and at four-year intervals for other items, including farm structure and the use of inputs. The underlying principle is that the sample, survey and questionnaire designs provide the capability to link data across surveys and over time. The integrated survey framework also includes other data sources, especially administrative sources, in a comprehensive and integrated data collection and survey framework;

(c) The data management system provides three capabilities, starting with access to official statistics for dissemination purposes and integration with the FAOSTAT statistical database as a global public good. The other capabilities of the data management system include the storage and retrieval of survey results and access to farm, household and land use data for research and data analysis. The system builds on the capabilities provided by the master sample frame's linkage to land use and the provision of overlap between data collections by the integrated survey design. The data management system will provide analysis capabilities starting with the validation of survey data to data analysis across surveys and over time.

34. The third pillar is the sustainability of the statistical system. The implementation of these principles will require improved governance at the national level, with clear identification of roles and responsibilities for the national statistical office, the ministry of agriculture and other line ministries. As agricultural statistics in many countries are largely provided by the ministry of agriculture, the strategy recommends that each country establish a national statistical council to coordinate the development of the master sample frame, the establishment of the integrated survey framework, the implementation of a data management system and the inclusion of agriculture in the national strategy for the development of statistics. However, the strategy gives each country the responsibility for deciding on the specific institutional framework and the allocation of responsibilities among the various institutions.

35. Better coordination will also be needed among international organizations supporting statistical capacity-building and providing technical support to developing countries. The Global Strategy calls on donors to coordinate their efforts to improve agricultural and rural statistics and to establish a programme of statistical capacity-building on the identified set of methodological tools.

36. The Global Strategy concludes by providing an overview of the challenges remaining, and the steps towards an implementation plan. The greatest challenge is to improve countries' statistical capacity, which will be needed to properly implement the three pillars explained above. Another challenge is to address many of the unresolved methodological problems associated with agricultural surveys and, at the same time, to take advantage of technical developments.

37. The Global Strategy is a long-term effort that will be implemented in stages, according to the level of development of the statistical system of each country. Countries needing to reform their statistical system will begin with the minimum core data set and build the rest over time. The next group are those countries in the process of implementing their national strategies for the development of statistics. These national strategies need to be reviewed in the light of the Global Strategy and revised if necessary. The third group includes countries with developed statistical systems. However, many of these do not meet the integration requirement and will need to begin by developing a master sample frame for agriculture and an integrated database.

IV. Summary and recommendations

38. The Global Strategy will provide national and international agricultural statistical systems guidance on ways to meet policymaking and decision-making needs in the twenty-first century. The agreement reached on a minimum core data set, the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system and the adoption of common methodologies will improve the quality of the statistics provided. More importantly, this integration will provide stronger support for advocating the importance of agriculture, for mobilizing resources at the national and international levels and for rebuilding the statistical capacity of key data producers. An essential prerequisite for the implementation of the Strategy will be countries' support in establishing the appropriate governance mechanism and in providing adequate resources for agricultural statistics. The donor community should support this country-led process by providing the necessary financial and technical resources.

39. In order for the Global Strategy to meet expectations for improved capacity, better quality and greater quantity of agricultural and rural data for users, many countries, in particular developing countries, will require adequate technical and financial support to strengthen and upgrade their current system of agricultural statistics. Once approved, the Global Strategy should be immediately followed by a corresponding implementation plan with a comprehensive capacity-building programme. It is proposed that the plan be prepared in 2010 following the same broad-based consultation and review process by the national and international partners as was the case for the Global Strategy. Once finalized, the donor community is expected to provide the necessary financial and technical support to the implementation plan of the Global Strategy.

40. The implementation plan should provide for methodological areas requiring research and development. For example, in many situations, the estimation of crop yields still poses challenges. In addition, technology, such as the satellite imagery used for the master sample frame and early warning, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and hand-held computers for data collection, needs to be developed for use in agriculture. The integrated survey framework calls for expertise in sample and survey design and the development of data warehouse technology.

41. The implementation plan should be based on case studies of countries showing: (a) the timing and frequency with which the core indicators have been provided in the past; (b) the last three time periods for which a census of agriculture was conducted; (c) whether that census was complete or partial, and its scope and coverage of small and subsistence households; (d) the respective responsibilities of the national statistical offices and ministries of agriculture; and (e) the status of the national strategies for the development of statistics.

42. The implementation plan should provide input on the depth of the problem, determine resources needed to develop the statistical system and outline the necessary steps to develop the master sample frame, the integrated survey framework and data management system.

43. The implementation plan should provide the framework for the involvement of donor and international organizations in the implementation of the Global Strategy.

44. FAO will lead the implementation of the Global Strategy in close partnership with international, regional and national agencies. Work is being initiated under the

FAO Impact Focus Area on Capacity Building in Information and Statistics and in close partnership with international and regional institutions.

45. The process of designing or revising the national strategy for the development of statistics in International Development Association countries should systematically be used to integrate and mainstream agriculture statistics into the national statistical system. FAO, Paris21 and other agencies should provide technical guidance to facilitate this integration and mainstreaming of agriculture into the national strategies. A bottom-up approach to the preparation of the national strategies and effective governance and coordination mechanisms within the agriculture and rural sectors and between those sectors and the rest of the national statistical system are key elements for proper integration and call for a country-by-country review of the status of national statistical systems.

46. The main directions of statistical capacity development include: (a) building the basic statistical infrastructure (frames, master samples, integrated survey framework, etc.); (b) providing education and training on new methodological tools and new technologies (GPS, remote sensing); (c) developing data analysis tools on methods of using data to answer policy questions; and (d) building a regional approach and partnerships for a sustainable statistical system.

47. In summary, after a broad-based consultative process involving all major stakeholders, there is a large consensus on the need for the Global Strategy, and on its technical content and direction. It is expected that the implementation of this Strategy will significantly improve the availability and increase the quality and quantity of agricultural rural statistics, and enhance the capacity of countries to produce data on a more sustainable basis. It is also recognized that there is a need to prepare a corresponding detailed implementation plan for the Global Strategy, to be agreed upon by all stakeholders and technically and financially supported by countries, the donor community and technical cooperation agencies at international and regional levels.

48. The next steps include:

(a) The development, in 2010, of an implementation plan for the Global Strategy (including a comprehensive capacity-building programme) to be widely reviewed and discussed with all stakeholders and presented at the Fifth International Conference on Agricultural Statistics in October 2010 in Kampala;

(b) The submission of the implementation plan to the Statistical Commission for comments and endorsement at its forty-second session, to be held in 2011; and

(c) The initiation by FAO, in partnership with other international and regional agencies and donor agencies, of the implementation of the Global Strategy in regions and countries where conditions are adequate.

49. The Commission is requested to:

(a) Comment on and endorse the Global Strategy;

(b) Direct FAO, under the auspices of the Friends of the Chair, to prepare the *implementation plan for the Global Strategy and submit it for the approval of the* Commission at its forty-second session.